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ABSTRACT

As American schools struggle to meet the needs of an increasingly disenfranchised adolescent population, many models of restructuring are tried. This study explores one school for at-risk students wherein teachers worked weekly with a therapist. Positive student outcomes garnered through this educational and therapeutic process are examined. An anonymous survey was administered to 15 students addressing: (1) curriculum; (2) policies; (3) teacher attitude; and (4) quality of relationships between students and teachers. A second survey was administered to four staff members and a school consultant addressing: (1) teacher attitudes; and (2) school and district support of teachers, school policies, and parent involvement. Attitudes indicated that the process was helpful for assuring that teachers were prepared to address the varied academic and affective needs of the student body. Results of the survey were discussed with volunteers from each group. Participants gained an understanding of an "ideal" school as a result of these discussions. An appendix providing the results of ths Student Belief Survey is provided. Contains eight references. (Author/SR)

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Positive Academic and Affective Student Outcomes At a Small School for At- Risk Adolescents Through Ongoing Teacher Consultation with a Marriage, Family, Child Counselor

By

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April, 1994

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Abstract

This study explores one school for at-risk students wherein teachers worked weekly with a therapist. Positive student outcomes garnered through this educational and therapeutic process are examined. Students, teachers, school counselor and the principal were interviewed about their perceptions of the success of this process. The process itself and outcomes were explored through individual and group interviews. Attitudes indicated that the process was helpful for assuring that teachers were prepared to address the varied academic and affective needs of the student body. Results of the survey were discussed with volunteers from each group. Participants gained an understanding of an "ideal" school as a result of these discussions.

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Introduction

The popular media bombards us daily with images of the American student as incapable, unthinking, and disconnected. As schools struggle to meet the needs of an ever-more disenfranchised adolescent population many models of restructuring are tried, some successful, some not.

This paper presents a review of high school drop-out statistics and the causes of early school leaving. Attempts to create more comprehensive programs in schools in an effort to reverse the drop-out trends are examined. Special attention is paid to how these reform attempts compare to one set of criteria established by the Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools (Wehlage, Smith & Lipman 1992). These criteria make a distinction between reforms that directly impact the student population and attempts that affect the teachers and other staff members to help them to better serve the student population.

The massive restructuring movement across the nation shows diverse methods of trying to increase the success of American students. While many complain that the schools should not be concerning themselves with anything but education, others maintain the school is often the only agency with which at-risk populations interact. As a result of this, multi-agency collaborations are often tried in an effort to

meet the varied needs of youth. In the face of the risk factors that affect many of our country's youth, not only in the urban centers, but in suburban and rural areas, schools must continually search for effective methods of maintaining and improving the quality of contact between students and the system.

Attempts have been made to include public service agencies in the work of schools so that the students personal needs can be met as well as their academic ones. At one small public alternative school in a northern California suburb a model has been in place for over a year wherein the school staff meets with a psychologist on a weekly basis to gain understanding of various student issues, family structures, and curriculum and policy changes as they relate to the students' mental health needs.

Statement of the Problem

This study examines a small public school for at-risk adolescents set up as an alternative to the comprehensive high school. For between four and six hours per day, teachers work intensively with students who are labeled "at risk" for reasons of non-attendance, lack of academic progress or poor attitude. Officially, they are at risk of not graduating from high school. In reality they are at risk of many greater problems than that, including joining gangs, becoming pregnant,

contracting AIDS, being beaten severely by their families or friends, getting in car accidents, dying of drug overdose, and so on.

The school team includes two teachers, a teaching principal, and a one day per week school counselor. Two months after the school opened in 1992 the staff hired a Marriage, Family and Child Counselor (MFCC) to meet with the staff one hour per week to discuss classroom issues, personal struggles, organizational structure and educational philosophy. This was viewed as the most sensible way to use a limited counseling budget to serve students who have difficulty bonding to adults that they do not know well. If the teachers could become more proficient at the counseling - type skills that seemed to be vital to working with these students, then the students would be able to benefit more readily from the academic help offered by the staff.

This study explores how this school for at-risk students struggles to meet the criteria for comprehensive restructuring in the best interest of the students through their ongoing relationship and work with this MFCC. Positive student outcomes garnered through this educational and therapeutic process are examined. Students, teachers, school counselor, principal, and the consulting therapist were consulted about their perceptions of the success of the school and this guidance process. The process itself and outcomes were explored through surveys and group interview.

Rationale

It has been understood for some time that the standard comprehensive high school does not best serve the needs of all students. While most analysts of the data estimate that about 25% of all American youth fail to graduate from high school, this figure does not appear alarming when compared to drop out rates in the early part of the century (Dryfoos, 1993; Wehlage & Rutter; 1986). Between 1900 and 1967 the drop out rate decreased from 90 % to 12% (Wehlage & Rutter, 1986, p.374). It would seem from these figures that the situation is improving, but in reality the situation has more negative consequences now, because as the drop-out rates have decreased the labor market has changed drastically. In the early 1900's, students who left school were easily absorbed into the labor market. Stratford (1993) cites Rumberger in reporting that dropouts from the 1981-82 school year had unemployment rates almost twice as high as graduates in the 1982 school year. The negative impact on the individual is obvious, but the impact to society is of concern as well.

Rumberger, as cited in Stratford, (1993) points to studies which identify the following seven societal consequences of failure to complete high school: (1) forgone national income; (2) forgone tax revenues; (3) increased demand for social services; (4) increased crime; (5) reduced political participation; (6) reduced intergenerational mobility; and(7) poor levels of health (p.2) .

Drop out statistics are difficult to accurately measure because there are no hard and fast definitions of who actually makes up the group of drop outs. There is controversy over whether students who leave school and complete the Graduation Equivalency Diploma (GED) or enroll in night classes at adult school should be included in the statistics. There are also those students who are commonly called "stop-outs;" that is to say they leave school for a period of time, but eventually return to earn their diploma. Districts also can play with drop-out statistics: to compete for grant money they might inflate the numbers, to show program success they might find ways to decrease them (Stratford, 1993).

Stratford shows that minority and inner city youth are at the greatest risk for dropping out, and that they are precisely the population that is the fastest growing in the United States. Coupled with the statistic that in 1993, 23% of America's children were below poverty level, this information demands that drastic changes must be implemented in education soon.

Background and Need

Attempts at reform have been tried in many cities. The Annie E. Casey foundation's New Futures Initiative approached resolving the fragmentation of services to children by implementing a five year grant of approximately $40 million to four cities. They hoped to develop a

comprehensive and coordinated approach to serving the needs of at-risk youth (Wehlage & Smith, et al, 1992).

The New Futures attempt at restructuring in which supplemental interventions were made in the schools by various social agencies, failed to truly impact the effectiveness of the institutions. These intercessions left the schools unaltered in some important aspects. In the third year of a five year study of the New Futures schools, the Center for Organization and Restructuring of Schools found that there were vital components missing.

The problems that the study unearthed had to do with how those extra services were perceived by personnel. The staff members at the schools tended to use the social service case workers that were provided to control student behavior. The researchers saw this approach to be less effective than allowing the psychologists and social workers with expertise on the issues facing students help influence school structure and policies. The study found that a limitation of the intervention toward reform was their trying to find ways of altering the students rather than the institution. It seemed that the schools felt it was the kid that was "broken" and not the system. At this point the researchers refined the criteria for restructuring to insure that the new resources provided by the grants would be used most effectively (Wehlage, et al., 1992).

The criteria set up by the center include three that address a vision of outcomes for students: (1) a sense of membership in the school, (2) student engagement in authentic work, and (3) valid assessment of student performance. Four criteria have been set up that are aimed at educators and guide the process of restructuring so that the student outcomes can be met. They include: (1) moral commitment to disadvantaged youth, (2) reflection and dialogue about education, (3) empowerment to respond to educational issues, and (4) strengthened resources for the school.

As these criteria are a comprehensive overview of the elements of reform, I examine other reform attempts, including those of one small alternative school as they relate to the dictates of The Center for Organization and Restructuring of Schools (Wehlage, et al., 1992).

Review of the Literature

Across the country reforms are constantly taking place, some successful in finding new ways to serve our youth and prepare them for their futures, some successful only in eliminating possibilities of ways to accomplish these goals. We can learn from both.

Building Community

Peterson, (1992) focuses on the work of teachers to make the learning environment most conducive to true life long learning for

the students. Peterson draws on his experiences in classroom teaching and the work of Vygotsky (1978) to point out that the student needs to belong in a community in order to feel safe enough to take the risks involved in true search for meaning. Reflecting the work of Wehlage he echoes the idea that demonstrations of care and support from teachers and peers are vital to developing the climate that allows students to fail and learn from their mistakes without having to experience scorn or ridicule.

In order for teachers to create a supportive environment Peterson acknowledges that they need to meet and share their thinking and talk about problems. He points out that these support groups help teachers develop their beliefs and practices and encourage them to take risks of their own and strengthen resolve (Peterson, 1992). He talks about progressional learning which compares with Wehlage's idea of authentic work. He has found success in students deciding on their own learning, taking initiative, making choices, and engaging in critique.

Wehlage's prescription for authentic assessment is evidenced in Peterson's model when he calls for teacher and student collaboration in the stage of meaning-making of the learning. He asks that teachers follow students' lead in developing the understanding of what a student can do now with the knowledge acquired in a learning experience. Together the value of the experience is established.

Where Wehlage calls for reflection and dialogue about educational issues, Peterson offers the critiquing cycle wherein the student / teacher collaborative effort identifies what is to be critiqued, judges its worth by asking what it should be, make plans for improving, and tries again.

Similar to the Center's criteria for the teachers to have a moral commitment to disadvantaged youth evidenced by actions that show concern, care, and hope, is Peterson's mandate that teachers engage in dialogue that affirms and dignifies students. Peterson asserts that true dialogue cannot exist without a profound love of the world and people.

To increase a sense of student membership Peterson (1991, p. 120), like Wehlage, posits that the "do as I say" idea of authority is not consistent with strengthening students ability to critique the world for themselves and to bring form to their own interpretations of experience. Peterson wants students to begin to speak from the authority of their own experience and work to nudge them along a pathway that will demonstrate the value of critiquing knowledge constructed by others (p.124). Wehlage's group recommends that "effective disciplinary policies must be aimed at helping students find productive ways of resolving conflicts with peers and adults" (Wehlage et al. 1992, p. 85).

Peterson's thesis, that it is an error to teach in any one way without respect for all the aspects of the students as social,

multi-faceted learners, is summed up in his concept of holism as it relates to education and the way classrooms must be structured. He believes that it is the way of people to work at making sense of their experience and that each person is the center of his or her own knowing. Wehlage, et al agree, and state that learning must be socially and personally useful as well as aesthetically valuable for a school to be doing its best to meet the needs of its at-risk populations.

The Four "C's"

Mann, (1986), in his article, puts forth that 51% of males and 33% of females who dropout do so because they dislike school. Mann cites Robert Crain in explaining that research shows that business is more interested in the attitudes and habits of potential employees than in their academic skills. The Committee for Economic development points out that regular patterns of tardiness and a history of uncompleted assignments will make a poor employee (Mann, 1986).

Exploring the multiplicity of programs that are in place for potential dropouts, Mann finds that programs that succeed in keeping young people in school are those that have four things in common. He establishes that basic skills teaching and learning by itself is not enough. He believes that programs that have four C's -- cash, care, computers, and coalitions are the ones that work. Early investment in

education can reduce the amount of money needed to support people later on in their lives.

He believes that there is no substitute for adults knowing young people by name and asking about their lives. Mann states that one consequence of this practice is that the institution cannot be very large and that the teacher - student ratio must be lower than typically found (Mann p. 319). When students use computers in the classroom and their success rates are tracked through computers, fewer students fall through the cracks. Coalitions of service agencies whose budgets will be affected by dropout rates must become involved in the education of students in a preventative way.

Support for Teachers

Comer's New Haven Schools Project has been radical in its reforms. Comer (1987) points out that the factors that put students at risk include those within the community and the family as well as the school. He maintains that mental health professionals working with students in isolation are less effective than those that can adequately address the quality of relationships among and between community, parents, staffs, and students.

Academic learning must be understood as a product of overall child development and not as an isolated mechanical function determined by the child's innate intelligence and will. Teaching and

service professionals in the schools must obtain the skills necessary to create a school-relationship climate that promotes development and learning. (Comer, 1987; Peterson, 1992; Wehlage, et al. 1992)

School and community collaboration in New Haven, Connecticut spans the past nineteen years. Comer, the director of the Yale Child Study Center, maintains that today's job needs require a very high level of psychosocial and academic development for kids to be successful in school and later in adult life. He points to the mental health response of schools in the 1950's to affective and behavior problems in the schools. He argues that these were only marginally successful because although they both diagnosed and treated students, they did not adequately address the quality of relationships among community, parents, staffs, and students. He maintains that the hierarchical and authoritarian organizations of schools have never been able to serve the needs of the diversity of populations (Comer, 1987).

Like Wehlage, Comer recommends that teachers be given the resources that they need to develop the skills to create a school relationship climate that promotes development and learning. He asserts that a teachers are of little value to students if they cannot relate well to them and cannot motivate desirable behavior and learning. He believes that teacher training should give educators opportunities to develop sensitivity, gain knowledge and acquire skills in applying child

development and behavior principles. He believes that preservice training for teachers should include work on learning to collaborate with psychologists and social workers.

Comer states:

> It has been my experience that where the knowledge and skills of support staff are used to strengthen the child development knowledge and behavior of classroom teachers and to create a desirable social climate in a school, many behavior and learning problems decrease. Teachers with adequate child development and behavior knowledge refer fewer children for special services. (Comer, 1987, p. 14)

In the New Haven Schools Project three mechanisms are in place that comprise a collaborative, modifiable social system. These enable schools to meet the mandates of the Center for Organization and Restructuring of Schools that teachers are provided with empowerment and opportunities for reflective dialogue. The three mechanisms are a governance and management group, a mental health or support-staff group, and a parents group. Within this system, the mental health team is able to work in a preventative fashion as well as in a traditional treatment mode.

The building level governance and management group, with representation from teachers, a social worker, school principal, and parents is able to make decisions that are sensitive to child development and behavior principles. These decisions can be in

relation to school policies that foster an environment more conducive to student success as well as curriculum modification and individual student issues.

These strategies, integrated into the schools in New Haven have proven effective and empowering for members of the system. Test scores rise and behavior problems decrease dramatically in schools where these programs are implemented .

One-Stop Service Centers

In Dryfoos' exploration of schools as places for health, mental health, and social services she shows that linkages between health status and educational achievement point us in a new direction. She recommends that we incorporate our services so that schools can be one-stop service centers where students can attend to all their needs, both personal and academic. The Office of Technology Assessment (OTA) has recommended that schools build mental health teams to work with school personnel to develop more effective responses to high risk children (Dryfoos, 1993).

Dryfoos explores models of programs that incorporate social, mental health, and health services with schools. The successful models have in common that the staffs as well as the students are served by the mental health team.

Dryfoos points to the problems Wehlage and his group found in evaluating the New Futures schools as ones common to large scale programs and she points out that often the documented successful programs are ones that are small in scale. Often these are groups of staff or individuals from community agencies who through categorical funding come into schools and provide specialized counseling , treatment, and referral to outside agencies.

Social Support for Students

One study on the transitional nature of adolescence indicates that webs of social support thoughtfully and intentionally provided can make a crucial difference in the health and educational attainment of these at-risk adolescents (Price, Cioci, Penner, & Trautlein, 1993). These researchers speak to the need for social support in the provision of aid, affirmation, and affect. Aid is defined as primary practical services and material benefits, while affirmation is self-esteem building feedback that strengthens identity. Affect is that provision of affection, caring, and nurturance.

This study explores the systems with which young people interact. It discovers that many including schools form social environments that do not fulfill the social needs of students. Caring community, a vital element in supportive social systems, is not developed to the extent that would be most effective for students.

Included in the guidelines for successful social support programs for adolescents are empathy and insight on the part of the adults, opportunities for growth and mastery in adolescents, program responsiveness to adolescent development, and organizational support. These criteria mirror Wehlage's in that they value the individual youth's relationships and place in the community as it influences their potential for success in other areas of life.

Factors that are vital in learning situations are those that include experiential learning as opposed to passive listening and learning. They present a number of programs which have components that support active involvement by youth improving their own community.

Timing and continuity are important to successful programs because students who are reached earlier and who maintain contact with agency personnel over a longer period of time are more successful. The establishment of trusting relationships helps to provide continuity and security for the adolescents.

Price, et al. (1992), endorse the idea that smaller is better. They assert that when more students are able to occupy the roles in the experiential learning environment, the learning opportunities are better and more frequent.

Parent and family involvement are also seen as important to the process of learning and engaging young people. The influx of ideas,

resources, and indications of commitment from all people concerned about the adolescent add to the possibilities of success for the young people. The connections between the various agencies and communities that have a vested interest in the young people are as important as any of the agencies themselves.

These common themes in the literature highlight the need for schools to evaluate themselves as to whether or not they are best serving the needs of adolescents.

Methodology

Subjects

The subjects are the students and staff from a small suburban school for at-risk adolescents in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Materials

The researcher administered an anonymous survey addressing curriculum, policies, teacher attitude, and the quality of relationships between students and teachers. Fifteen student subjects responded on a five point Likert scale.

The researcher administered another survey, addressing teacher attitudes, school and district support of teachers, school policies, and parent involvement to all four members of the school staff and the school's consultant. These surveys were not anonymous.

The questions in the surveys are based on the seven criteria developed by Wehlage et al. (1992) to determine if a comprehensive restructuring process is underway.

Follow-up interviews were conducted with volunteers from the student population and with all members of the staff. This process provided an opportunity for subjects to elaborate on their responses to the questionnaire and to discuss the school's attempts to best meet the affective and academic needs of the students.

Procedure

All students in the program were given the opportunity to participate in the survey portion of the study. The school counselor administered the survey to twenty students. Fifteen chose to respond to the questions.

All staff members were given a copy of their survey to fill in on their own time. The researcher interviewed staff members as a group during the time allocated for staff meetings to elicit more complete responses about the effectiveness of this school's process for evolving as a more effective institution. In the interview process the group explored why staff members responded to the survey with the answers they did. The researcher then analyzed the responses to the questionnaires to evaluate the successes in place and the areas within

which improvement is needed. Avenues for bringing the small school more closely into alignment with the ideal Wehlage school were explored.

Results

Analysis of Staff Survey

The staff survey included statements asking for opinions about district administration support for the schools reforms, teacher attitudes toward students and education, school policies, school support for teacher empowerment, needs, and preparation, and parent involvement. The survey was created so that answers of "always" or "often would show that the school is close to or does meet the criteria of the Center for Organization and Restructuring of Schools (Wehlage, et al. 1992).

Overview of Staff Responses

Staff "always" and "often" responses

44 %	District administrative support
100 %	Teacher attitudes toward education and students
90 %	School policies
84 %	School support for teacher empowerment, needs, and preparation
36 %	Parent involvement

Staff perceptions of district support varied due to their individual interactions with the district. There was some confusion among those who answered the questionnaire about what was meant by the term "school clinics". During the interview the researcher made clear that the question was about school based health clinics and at that time the staff came into agreement that the district rarely or never provided clinics. Those who answered "sometimes" originally changed their answers to "rarely" and "never" when the language was cleared up.

Teacher attitudes corresponded well with those the Wehlage group thought important for a successful program. The entire staff perceive themselves as having the attitudes that the Wehlage study found important for program success. All staff members identified themselves as believing that educating all people including the most alienated from school is a moral obligation in a democratic society, and they see themselves unanimously as showing concern, care, and hope toward students on a daily basis. They believe that the staff critically analyzes the curriculum and instruction, school policies and practices, and assumptions about student abilities.

School policies also were identified as being closely aligned to the recommended ones. The whole staff responded that they believe policies for suspension, failure, and retention are fair , and staff members believe that the school does provide collegial structures for

planning, evaluation, and peer observation during the school day regularly.

The staff members believe that the school provides support and respect for them as educators through empowerment, time allowed for planning and evaluation, and reflective, collaborative dialogue. All the staff members value the process that they have with the consultant. They were unanimous in their positive answers relating to the effectiveness of the process of using the consultant to serve students' needs better through reflective dialogue about student and staff issues, school policies, and mental health.

They believe that the weak area in the program concerns parent involvement. Although they believe that parents have much greater contact with school personnel at the small school than at a comprehensive high school, they aspire to include them more in the structure of the program. The staff discussed the fact that often the parents of the at-risk student are at risk themselves. It is unlikely that the parents are comfortable interacting with the school on a regular basis. Staff admitted that parents are extremely grateful that the school is serving the students. Parents seem to be relieved that the phone calls home are from staff who can speak to the student's development and progress rather than a recording that reports which classes the student has cut.

Staff members do feel that parents have educational needs as well and discussed making parent involvement a higher priority in the future. Possibilities explored were parent support group meetings, using parents as volunteers on field trips, and asking them to share their careers and/or special interests with the students.

During the staff interview the researchers were given the results of both the student and staff surveys and were asked to comment on what effect the weekly process with the consultant had on the outcomes of the surveys. In the interview the staff members expressed that they felt the weekly process with the consultant helps them to keep in the forefront mental health issues as opposed to discipline or rules. They find that the process allows them to develop positive plans of action for students from the insight into individual cases that is gained through the process with the counselor.

Staff members feel much more capable in their jobs as time goes by due to this opportunity for reflective dialogue. They feel empowered to dive into relationships with students that might seem difficult. The consultation process allows them access to tools which can help them develop positive relationships with students.

The staff values the clinical feedback that the consultant provides them as well. Often they have asked for specific information about anti-depressant prescription drugs that students are taking, and

the consultant has been able to provide information about side effects to watch for, and expected outcomes.

Because the consultant has links to other social service agencies in the county, the staff is able to use him as a resource for families who need help that the school cannot provide. Other positive outcomes of the process were explored in the following dialogue.

"He serves as a community member who can provide ongoing affirmation that we're on the right track."

The principal agreed and added, "It's also affirmation of alternative education in general, and our mission."

"Yes," said another, "but is that because of his own background in alternative education or because of his psychology background?"

"I think it has to do with both. He does understand what we're trying to do here, but it's his ability to help us frame our relationships with a psychological philosophy of working through problems and issues that's primary. "

"At another school, many of these kids would just be kicked out. (the consultant) helps us to work to modify our program and explore new strategies rather than bounce a kid or try to get him to change."

"Yes, it's not as if if we come up with the right rule (kid A) will miraculously sit down and do his work. "

"That's right. What we do here (in this consultation process) is work to realign the structure or our own view of the kids so that we

can create new pathways for the kid or to help undo roadblocks that have historically kept the kid from being successful."

"You know, as far as what the students said about our school preparing them more for life than school, the longer we do this the more I think we have a better chance of getting them through life than we do of getting them through school."

"And that's exactly why we need this process. It helps us keep our goals in the forefront. We never stay depressed or burned out for long, because this process is rejuvenating and hopeful. We always leave with a plan of action. And we can evaluate how successful it was the following week."

Analysis of Student Survey

The student survey included statements asking for opinions about counseling relationships between students and teachers, teacher commitment and attitudes, relevance of curriculum and the fairness and respectfulness of school policies toward students at both the small alternative school and the students' previous schools.

Overview of Student Responses

Student "always" and "often" responses

Small School	Previous School	
82 %	13 %	Counseling relationships between teachers and students
88 %	18 %	Teacher commitment and attitude
55 %	12 %	Relevance of curriculum
39 %	4 %	Fairness and respectfulness of school policies toward students

Student responses to statements regarding the relationships between students and staff indicated that at the small school they are able to develop better relationships with teachers than at the comprehensive high school. They believe that their teachers at the small school are much more committed to the success of all students and that the teachers show care and concern for students on a daily basis more regularly than those at their previous schools.

The curriculum is more relevant to the students lives at the small school than at their previous schools, although students still see room for improvement in this area. Similarly, the fairness and respectfulness of policies at the small school scored higher than those

at the previous schools, although the gap between the small school and previous school answers were less marked in this area.

Students expressed that they feel their current teachers are committed to the success of all students regardless of their academic achievement, race or social circumstances much more often than those teachers at their previous school. The three questions about guidance and counseling opportunities and teacher-student relations evidenced an opinion that at the small school students felt that more opportunities were provided for guidance and counseling and that in fact, a large majority of the students believed that adults at the small school always developed guidance relationships with students.

Conversely, most of the students responded that adults at their previous school rarely if ever developed guidance relationships with students. Surveys showed, and students were quick to point out in interviews that the structure of the comprehensive school doesn't allow time for these relationships to develop.

One student was adamant that the survey seemed slanted. "These questions make (our school) look perfect and (our previous school) look rotten. It's not fair compare them. They are totally different environments."

Other students chimed in. "Yeah, of course teachers here have better attitudes. They have easier jobs."

"Yeah, if you (the researcher) had 160 students a day you'd have a bad attitude too."

"The big difference here is that we practically live with our teachers. They have the chance to get to know us one-on-one."

"Naw, the teachers at (our previous school) don't care."

"They suck."

"No, some of them care, they just care about academic stuff. They don't care about kids as people."

"A couple of them care about kids. Mr. K and Mr. G., if it weren't for them I never would have made it through freshman year."

"Yeah, but their core class was like this. We were with them for the whole morning. They had time, too."

"Most teachers though only care about the school stuff. Here the teachers care about who you are."

"You can't compare those teachers to you guys (small school teachers). They were taught to teach differently. This is a whole different thing. Here you guys were taught to teach by getting to know the students. They just use lesson plans and stuff. It's totally different."

"You know what the difference is here? They care about what you are going to do after you get out of here. At (our previous school) they only care about what you're gonna do while you're in school."

Students attitudes about the relevance of curriculum to their lives and real world problems revealed that at the small school students perceived greater value in the curriculum. During the interview it became apparent that the students felt the comprehensive school prepares students for more school, while the alternative school prepares students for life.

On the whole , students felt that the small school's policies showed much greater respect and fairness to students than had their previous schools. A much greater percentage of students indicated that policies were fair or respectful at the small school than at their previous school.

Students feel that the standard methods of discipline such as suspension and detention don't do any good.

"What's a suspension do for you? Gets you exactly what you want, out of school."

"Yeah, get in trouble, go to the beach."

"So, what's the difference here? " the researcher asked.

"Here you guys don't bust anybody."

(R.) "Why not?"

"Nobody does anything wrong."

(R.) "Why not?"

"Kids have more respect here because teachers have more respect for kids. You don't want to do anything wrong."

"There's nothing to get in trouble for here. You couldn't do anything to get in trouble."

"You want to get along because you know you have to be here all day. It's not like you can leave at the end of the period."

"Even though everybody here is from different social groups we all get along. Everybody's accepted."

Discussion

The surveys and interviews conducted for this study confirm that the process of using a MFCC as a consultant for teachers in one school for at-risk adolescents works well. Teachers feel supported enough to take risks in developing guidance relationships with students. Students feel the difference in the teachers' behavior, and see it as marked enough that one student thought the small school teachers were trained differently than those at the comprehensive school.

A district commitment to site based management allows staff to feel that they have enough autonomy to make decisions about their particular school's environment - decisions that can positively affect students' learning, both academic and personal. They seem to be well suited to working in the environment that they do; they were not trained in any particular way in a credentialing program as the student

suspected. They just have the values and beliefs that make them well suited to alternative education.

The system that they have set up to support themselves in the face of a difficult job works well for them, and seems to be a model that can work well for others in similar small schools. The cost is manageable, as the psychologist is used for one hour per week, and the benefits of those sessions are felt throughout the school during each school day. The counselor serves as a connection between the school and other agencies, providing the school staff with vital information about what other support services are available for school families.

The students at the school feel the difference in their teachers, and recognize that much of that difference has to do with the structure of the school. Its small size, personal focus, and flexible, student-centered nature makes it a more respectful, nurturing environment for both teachers and students. The teachers work as a team, with time allotted for reflective dialogue on a regular basis. This helps prevent burnout on the staff, a common problem for teachers of at-risk students.

As the research has shown, students who feel connected and cared for are at less risk of dropping out of school than those who feel isolated and ignored. This school provides an environment where students can be educated and feel cared for and encouraged, in part because, as the research demands, the teachers are taken care of as well.

The implications include that all schools that serve at-risk students would be well advised to make sure that they are serving their teachers. Teachers are often the people with whom a student has the most consistent contact on any given day. If, as the principles of democracy dictate, we have a moral responsibility to educate all students, even the ones most alienated from school, then we must support the people to whom we give that task.

The pressures of being educators, models, and surrogate families to alienated students must be borne, not by the teachers alone, but by the community as a whole. By including the resources of the community in the schooling process, we can support those to whom we assign a difficult task: carefully ushering into the adult world the next generation of citizens.

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Appendix

February 20, 1994

Dear Student Study Participant:

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this study which is a portion of my research for my Masters of Science degree in Curriculum and Instruction. My research includes surveys that I will be giving to both students and staff at Sonoma Mountain High, and interviews that I will be conducting with students who agree to participate and all the staff here at the school.

I hope to find out if your experience at Sonoma Mountain High is different from your experience at your previous school. I am interested in knowing your opinions on how Sonoma Mountain High is meeting your needs, both academic and personal.

In the survey I will ask questions that relate to the course of study, teachers, and relationships at both your previous school and Sonoma Mountain High. These questions come from a profile of an ideal restructured high school that was developed by the U. S. Department of Education. If you feel uncomfortable about answering any question please feel free to circle "I don't know". If you choose not to participate, and you have the right to do so, please put your survey back into the envelope on the center of the table without having written on it. This way I can preserve everyone's right to anonymity.

If you choose to further assist me in my research, you may volunteer to be interviewed about the results of the survey. I will be holding a couple of small group discussions about the results. I hope to get more detailed responses from students about why the survey answers ended up being what they were.

No names will be used in the write-up of the study, and no information will be used against any student. If you feel uncomfortable with any of the material in the study, or with the interview session, should you decide to participate, Johanna, the school counselor who is also familiar with the study will be available to talk with you.

The written survey is absolutely anonymous. I will not read any of them until they are all in, and because it is a check off procedure I will be unable to recognize your handwriting.

Those students who agree to be interviewed can rest assured that no information given will be used against the student in relation to credits or grades earned, or opportunities given. No individual names will be used in the study, results will be reported as a group.

I realize that it might be awkward to speak honestly with a teacher about school curriculum, policies, and particularly her own role in all of these, but I ask that you respond honestly and openly.

The outcome of this survey is important in that from it I hope to get a clear idea of what is working for you and what is not.

The information that I gather and the work I do analyzing it will help me to become a better teacher and will help Sonoma Mountain High School to develop into the best school that it can be.

Thank you,

M. Molly Tuohy

Student Beliefs Survey
Sonoma Mountain High School
Margaret Molly Wertz Tuohy
Dominican College
Spring 1994

Results: 15 surveyed

	Always	Often	Some-times	Rarely	Never	Don't Know
1. I believe thatSonoma Mountain High School's policies on attendance and discipline show respect for students.	4	7	3	1		
2. My previous school's policies on attendance and discipline showed respect for students.		2	3	6	3	1
3. Sonoma Mountain High School provides opportunities for informal academic and personal counseling and other demonstrations of care and support.	5	8	2			
4. My previous school provided opportunities for informal academic and personal counseling and other demonstrations of care and support.	2		1	8	3	1
5. Sonoma Mountain High School allows time for students and adults to meet for guidance, counseling, and informal personal conversations.	6	5	1	1		2
6. My previous school allowed time for students and adults to meet for guidance, counseling, and informal personal conversations.	2		3	4	2	1
7. Adults at Sonoma Mountain High School develop guidance relationships with students.	3	10	2			
8. The adults at my previous school developed guidance relationships with students	1	1	1	8	4	
9. I believe that education is important to my future.	9	3	2			
10. I believe that my teachers at Sonoma Mountain High School are committed to my success.	7	6	2			
11. I believe that the teachers at my previous school were committed to my success.		2	7	4	2	
12. I believe that my teachers at Sonoma Mountain High School are committed to the success of all students regardless of their acedemic achievement, race, or social circumstances.	14	1				

	Always	Often	Some-times	Rarely	Never	Don't Know
13. I believe that the teachers at my previous school are committed to the success of all students regardless of their academic achievement, race, or social circumstances.	1	2	7	4	1	
14. I believe that the disciplinary policies at Sonoma Mountain High help students find productive ways of resolving conflicts with peers and adults.	1	5	7	1		
15. I believe that the disciplinary policies at my previous school help students find productive ways of resolving conflicts with peers and adults.			2	7	5	1
16. I believe that the work I do at Sonoma Mountain High is relevant to real world problems.	3	4	5	1		2
17. I believe that the work I did at my previous school is relevant to real world problems.		2	6	1	5	1
18. I consider the work I do at Sonoma Mountain High socially useful.	1	9	4	1		
19. I consider the work I did at my previous school socially useful.		4	4	3	4	
20. I consider the work I do at Sonoma Mountain High personally useful.	1	7	6			
21. I consider the work I did at my previous school personally useful.		1	6	3	5	
22. I believe that my learning at Sonoma Mountain High is connected to real life.	3	7	3	2		
23. I believe that my learning at my previous school is connected to real life.		3	3	6	3	
24. SMH provides me with opportunities similar to those I will encounter in social organizations outside of school.	2	7	6			
25. My previous school provided me opportunities similar to those I will encounter in social organizations outside of school.		1	6	4	4	

	Always	Often	Some-times	Rarely	Never	Don't know
26. SMH provides me with opportunities similar to those I will encounter in political organizations outside of school.	1	6	6		1	1
27. My previous school provided me opportunities similar to those I will encounter in political organizations outside of school.		3	3	4	3	2
28. SMH provides me with opportunities similar to those I will encounter in economic organizations outside of school.	1	6	2	3		3
29. My previous school provided me opportunities similar to those I will encounter in economic organizations outside of school.		2	5	2	3	3
30. SMH offers me opportunities to participate in community service.	6	4	5			
31. My previous school offered me opportunities to participate in community service.			6	3	5	1
32. SMH offers me the opportunity to participate in internships.	1	3	4	2	1	4
33. My previous school offered me the opportunity to participate in internships.	1	1	1	3	6	3
34. SMH offers me opportunities to build on my own strengths and interests.	6	6	1	1		1
35. My previous school offered me opportunities to build on my own strengths and interests		1	3	4	6	1
36. My teachers at SMH recognize that students are capable of exercising multiple intelligences.	6	7	1			1
37. The teachers at my previous school recognize that students are capable of exercising multiple intelligences.		3	4	6	1	1
38. The teachers at SMH encourage me to get involved in my own studies.	9	4	1	1		
39. The teachers at my previous school encouraged me to get involved in my own studies.		2	3	7	3	

	Always	Often	Some-times	Rarely	Never	Don't know
40. SMH provides me with information about what I can do with the knowlege I have acquired in school.	3	8	2	2		
41. My previous school provided me with information about what I can do with the knowlege I have acquired in school.		2	4	4	5	
42. The forms of testing and evaluation at SMH allow me the opportunity to prove what I have learned.	3	2	5	3		2
43. The forms of testing and evaluation at my previous school allowed me the opportunity to prove what I had learned.	2		6	3	4	
44. I believe that my teachers at SMH feel their work with me is important.	5	7	3			
45. I believe that the teachers at my previous school felt that their work with me was important.	1	3	1	7	3	
46. The teachers at SMH show concern, care, and hope for students on a daily basis.	5	8	2			
47. The teachers at my previous school show concern, care and hope for students on a daily basis.		2	5	3	5	
48. The policies at SMH around student suspension seem fair.	2	2	6	1	2	2
49. The policies at my previous school around student suspension seem fair.			5	3	6	1
50. I believe that all students at SMH have the opportunity for success.	7	7				1

Staff Survey
Sonoma Mountain High School
Margaret Molly Wertz Tuohy
Dominican College
Spring 1994

Results: Five people surveyed

	Always	Often	Some-times	Rarely	Never	Don't Know
1. Do you believe that educating all people, including those most aliennated from school is a moral obligation in a democratic society?	5					
2. Do you believe that discourse about students among the staff at this school affirms their dignity and potentisals?	4	1				
3. Do you that the actions of staff toward students show concern, care, and hope?	5					
4. Do you believe that the culture of Sonoma Mountain High School supports the above values?	4	1				
5. Do you believe that the staff monitors the general policies involving suspension, failure, and retention?	5					
6. Do you believe that the staff challenges many of the assumptions encountered in conventional schools?	4	1				
7. Do you observe reflective dialogue among the staff in regards to critical analysis of existing curricula and instruction, school policies and practices, and assumptions about student abilities?	4	1				
8. Do you observe plans of action based on reflective dialogue?	3	2				
9. Do yoy believe that there is a culture throughout the district which supports educational change?			3	1	1	
10. Do you believe that data regarding achievement, suspension, retention, and drop out rates are systematically discussed throughout the district?			2	2		1
11. Does the school provide collegial structures for planning, evaluation, and peer observation during the school day?	3	1				1
12. Does the district or school provide systematic, longterm training in group process, leadership, effective practices, and clinical observation?		2	1	1		1

	Always	Often	Some-times	Rarely	Never	Don't Know
13. Do you believe that you have the power to affect schoolwide decisions?	2	1	2			
14. Do you believe that there is a shared culture and collaborative relationship between teachers and administration?	4		1			
15. Do you believe that teachers are empowered to address issues related to curriculum and instruction, structuring of time and space, and educational outcome?	3	2				
16. Do you believe that the principal is empowered to address issues related to curriculum and instruction, structuring of time and space, and educational outcome?	3	2				
17. Do you believe that parents are empowered to address issues related to curriculum and instruction, structuring of time and space, and educational outcome?		1	2	1		1
18. Do you believe that students are empowered to address issues related to curriculum and instruction, structuring of time and space, and educational outcome?	1	2	2			
19. Do you believe that staff is informed about governance issues?	3	2				
20. Do you believe staff is informed about the constraints that policies place on school level decisions?	4					2
21. Do you believe that staff is informed about substantive issues related to curriculum?	3	1				1
22. Do you believe staff is informed about organizational alternatives available to schools?	2	2				1
23. Do you believe that staff have an orientation to problem solving?	4	1				
24. Do you believe that staff are are empowered by the district to take risks that might substantially improve the school experience for students?	2	2	1			
25. Does the district provide public validation, incentives, and technical assistance for you?	1	1	2	1		

	Always	Often	Some-times	Rarely	Never	Don't Know
26. Does the district provide you time for planning and dialogue about educational issues?			3	2		
27. Does the district provide for school clinics?			2	1	1	
28. Does the district provide for social services for students?			5			
29. Does your school perceive parents as resources?		1	3	1		
30. Does your school utilize parents in its efforts to reform education?			3	1		1
31. Does your school staff search energetically for effective means of informing parents and bringing them into the school?		4				1
32. Does your school provide assistance to parents in becoming a part of the participatory process?			3	2		
33. Do you believe that your work with the psychologist / consultant helps you to serve students better?	4					n/a
34. Do you believe that this consultant functions as an effective sounding board for reflective dialogue about the school's policies?	4					n/a
35. Do you believe that this consultant functions as an effective sounding board for reflective dialogue about students?	4					n/a
36. Do you believe that this consultant functions as an effective sounding board for reflective dialogue about staff issues?	4					n/a
37. Do you believe that this consultant functions as a resource for information about mental health?	4					n/a

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